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The Kanak Awakening of 1969-1976: Radicalizing Anti-Colonialism in New Caledonia

par

David CHAPPELL*

RÉSUMÉ

Cet article examine les racines des "événements" tragiques des années 1980 en Nouvelle-Calédonie, en argumentant que le réveil kanak de 1969 résultait d'une convergence de forces structurelles puissantes, telles que la recolonisation du territoire par la France dans les années 1960, accompagnée d'une immigration massive pendant le boom du nickel, ainsi que le retour chez eux des étudiants kanak et calédoniens qui avaient été radicalisés en France, où ils avaient vécu la révolte des étudiants et ouvriers en mai 1968. La tendance graduelle vers l'autonomie de l'Union calédonienne a été interrompue, mais la défense de l'indépendance kanak révolutionnaire polarise la population par des clivages ethniques et politiques. Aujourd'hui, alors que la France est en train de redonner plus d'autonomie à la Nouvelle-Calédonie, deux visions de la nationalité sont en concurrence : rester loyal à la France ou bien devenir un état souverain.

MOTS-CLÉS : décolonisation, radicalisation, réveil kanak, Foulards rouges, identité kanak, polarisation.

ABSTRACT

This article examines the roots of the tragic "events" of the 1980s in New Caledonia, arguing that the Kanak Awakening of 1969 resulted from a convergence of powerful structural forces, such as the recolonization of the territory by France in the 1960s, accompanied by massive immigration during a nickel mining boom, and the return home of radicalized Kanak and Caledonian students from France, where they had experienced the May 1968 student-worker uprising. The gradual, multi-ethnic trend toward autonomy by the Union calédonienne *had been interrupted, but the advocacy of revolutionary Kanak Independence polarized the population along ethnic and political lines. Today, France is again granting autonomy to New Caledonia, but two visions of nationhood are in competition: remaining loyal to France or becoming a sovereign state.*

KEYWORDS: decolonization, radicalization, Kanak awakening, *Foulards rouges*, indigenous identity, polarization.

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In such a climate, the action of small groups of extremists can be an effective catalyst in a moment when the habitual political structures find themselves weakened. […] *This demands that the Administration exercise particular vigilance.*
(Risterucci, French High Commissioner, New Caledonia, August 1969[1])

In 1969, the leader of the [Foulards Rouges] *movement was imprisoned along with some of my old school mates after a protest. It was a shock for me and marked the beginning of my awareness about the independence struggle.*
(Gorodé, *Pacific Magazine*, May 2001: 10)

The annual commemoration of 24th September, the date in 1853 when a French admiral unilaterally "took possession" of the islands of New Caledonia to help France compete with England as a colonial power (LNC, 24/09/2002), remains a contested identity symbol, despite two negotiated peace accords since the tragic "Events" of the 1980s. This essay will examine the roots of those Events, arguing that the ethnic and political polarization that caused intercommunal violence in the 1980s was not simply a product of long-term racial tension or of Cold War ideologies. Instead, it emerged from a convergence of forces around the year 1969, which pushed politics toward a more direct confrontation between self-determination and colonial rule. New political parties and coalitions, class divisions, a generation gap, tensions between tradition and modernity, changing demographic ratios, a nickel boom followed by a recession and increased economic dependency, and outside influences from France and beyond, all contributed to a process that would culminate in the Events.

One powerful force was what anti-colonial radicals called the "recolonization" of New Caledonia: Paris had granted the territory significant powers of self-government in the 1950s, and then withdrew them unilaterally in the 1960s. The *Union calédonienne* (UC), which had dominated local politics for a generation, objected strongly but was powerless to stop this centralizing trend and lost many supporters. New immigration during the nickel boom of the late 1960s and early 1970s also helped to change the electorate to an anti-autonomist majority. A dramatic counter-force appeared in 1969, the year when such Jacobinism reached its peak, because radical university students returned from France, having experienced the May 1968 student-worker uprising. A handful of Kanak and Caledonian youth protested actively against the Gaullist *reprise en main*. Although they at first lacked a mass base, except on Mare, they forced changes in local political discourse, organization and tactics, because they felt that the indigenous and laboring masses might never regain control over their own destiny. What developed were rival visions of nationhood and of decolonization.

Postwar Decolonization

In the modern history of the Kanak people, colonization after 1853 was an intrusion that redrew the political boundaries of New Caledonia, inscribing on the islands new arenas of identity formation[2]. It also assaulted the indigenous Melanesian civilization on numerous levels, defining its otherness against powerful European cultural and economic assumptions. Settlers claimed to bring peace and development and, through the French language, unity to the divided inhabitants (Chatenay, 1993: 328). Yet in practice, French colonization in New Caledonia was one of the most extreme cases of native denigration, incarceration and dispossession in Oceania. A frontier of cattle ranches, convict camps, mines and coffee farms moved across the main island of *Grande Terre*, conquering indigenous resisters and confining them to reserves that amounted to less than ten per cent of the land (Saussol, 1979; Merle, 1995). In the Pacific region, only the British settler colonies in Australia, New Zealand, and North America marginalized the indigenous people more. But New Caledonia never became what Alfred Crosby has called a

1. High Commissioner report to Secretary of State for DOM-TOMs (*Départements d'Outre-mer et territoires d'Outre-mer*), n° 310, 13 August 1969, Fonds 107W: 799, Archives territoriales de la Nouvelle-Calédonie (hereafter AT).

2. Indigenous Melanesians, who have twenty-eight languages, became known as *Canaques* (later *Kanak*), from the Hawaiian word for person, *kanaka*, which traveled around the Pacific on trade ships and plantations. The white settlers, however, became known as *Calédoniens* (later *Caldoches*), from British explorer James Cook's decision to name the main island of *Grande Terre* after Scotland (the old Caledonia).

"neo-Europe"[3] because Europeans remained a minority, as in Hawai'i, where non-white laborers provided immigrant groups with a demographic majority[4]. Despite their myths of being individualistic pioneers and prospectors, French *colons* exploited local resources using the cheap labor of convicts, Kanak forced laborers, or indentured Asians and New Hebrideans. "After all", a French administrator said in 1896, "colonization is only a business" (Delignon, 1898:173).

Missionaries and a few humane officials tried to aid the native people (Lambert, 1999), but the 1931 Colonial Exposition in Paris still portrayed them as savages, even loaning some to a Berlin zoo in exchange for crocodiles (*Mwà véé*, 1996). What shook up this structure of colonial domination was the fall of France in 1940, when the *mère patrie* itself became, directly or indirectly, a temporary colony of Nazi Germany (Césaire, 1955). New Caledonians rallied to Charles de Gaulle's Free France on the 19th of September, 1940 and deported Vichy supporters and Japanese residents[5]. But the isolation from France in World War II inspired new visions of autonomy, albeit Rhodesian-style, and also made the territory more dependent on its regional allies. Australia replaced Japan as a buyer of New Caledonian minerals, and a major United States military presence during the war caused a boom in the local economy. The wage-earning Melanesian labor force outside their reserves tripled, and more than a thousand Melanesians served in the French armed forces, creating a new political element after the war, when Melanesians would receive freedom of movement and citizenship rights. In addition, a local Communist Party emerged from the wartime alliance with the Soviet Union. It organized mine workers, especially poor whites and Vietnamese, and recruited Melanesians into an anti-colonial movement that still remained loyal to reform-minded postwar France (Kurtovitch, 2000).

At Brazzaville in 1944, Charles de Gaulle had promised new political rights and economic development to Free French loyalists in the colonies, and in 1946 France abolished the discriminatory *indigénat* and forced labor. Yet the goal was decolonization without separatism, i.e. assimilation into equal relations with the *métropole* so that France could regain its lost status in the world community. Regarding New Caledonia, French officials recommended not only a liberal policy but also renewed migration from the mother country to consolidate the French presence in the Pacific (Aldrich, 1993: 55-56). Since the 1789 revolution, French republican thinkers had regarded the "nation" as a willful construction that bound citizens together with equal rights (Bell), but clearly there was potential tension between full integration into the mother country and building one's own *patrie*. Meanwhile, the United Nations Charter of 1945 urged its members to promote not only the socio-economic development of "non-self-governing territories" but also their political self-determination, adding the rather equivocal caveat, "according to the particular circumstances of each territory and its peoples and their varying stages of advancement". Most colonial powers, including France, would refuse even to submit information about their overseas territories to the UN in the early post-war era. In 1960, the UN would harden its moral support for decolonization, creating the Committee of 24 to monitor it, but the UN would also recognize integration, in addition to free association or independence, as one way to end colonial (unequal) status (Roff, 1991: 5-10).

Alarmed by the success of the "atheist" Communist Party in recruiting Melanesian members after the war, the Catholic and Protestant missions organized associations in 1947 to promote Melanesian rights and welfare. They copied the mobilization tactics of the Communists and groomed Melanesian leaders who began to speak, not of the diverse identities among more than two dozen indigenous language groups, but of the native people as a whole. Both church associations promoted modernization and equal rights but also the protection of native reserves and customs. In 1951, they supported Maurice Lenormand in the election for Deputy to Paris, and he won, benefiting

3. In his 1993 book, Alfred Crosby argues that European colonists brought along familiar crops and animals and so outnumbered indigenous populations devastated by conquest and new epidemics that they transformed the new lands demographically, ecologically and economically, thus replicating Europe in various ways.

4. Imagine if almost half the population of Australia, New Zealand, Canada or the United States were indigenous today, as the Kanak are in New Caledonia. How might it affect their "national" politics?

5. The government confiscated the property of local Japanese, later auctioning off their mines and other holdings to European residents. See Philippe Palombo (2002).

from the expanding Melanesian electorate. Maurice Lenormand was also careful to side with the *petits Blancs* against the ruling "fifty families" of the *colon* bourgeoisie. In 1953, the centennial of French annexation, he led the newly-formed UC to victory in the election for General Council, winning 15 of 25 seats (including nine Melanesians) on a platform of "two colors, one people" (Kurtovitch, 2000). Over the next generation, the UC won majorities in elections and built up the country's social welfare system (Henningham, 1992: 51-54). In his vision of decolonization, Maurice Lenormand spoke of a unified Caledonian "personality" that could democratically govern its own affairs, as the French constitution permitted regions to do (Lenormand, 1953: 294-95). This progress under the Fourth Republic culminated the *loi-cadre* (Defferre) of 1956, which granted New Caledonia a Territorial Assembly (TA) elected by universal suffrage, which would in turn choose an executive Governing Council (GC) whose local Vice-President and cabinet ministers would now have real administrative portfolios (Henningham, 1992: 55).

New Caledonia had thus achieved a kind of autonomy under the leadership of a multiracial, progressive party, the UC, whose power was based on gradual promotion of the indigenous majority and class-oriented appeals to poor white and Asian workers. But events in Algeria would soon jeopardize those gains. French Socialists had campaigned in the 1955 election on a platform of decolonization, and the *loi-cadre* was essentially their peace plan for Africa. But the independence war in Algeria complicated matters, because it was a settler colony. Based on their experience in World War II, Gaullists saw the empire as crucial to French prestige and power and actively helped to undermine the weak Fourth Republic. When paratroopers sided with the *pied noir* Committee of Public Safety in Algiers in May 1958 and even seized Corsica, Charles de Gaulle himself came out of retirement to found the Fifth Republic. Although he was willing to let Algeria go, he intended to hold on to the remaining overseas territories (Kahler, 1984). New Caledonian loyalists felt that the *loi-cadre* had been inappropriate for their islands, and like-minded French army officers helped to fuel their discontent. On the 18th of June 1958, the annual commemoration of Charles de Gaulle's wartime call to rally to Free France, Caledonian settlers demonstrated in Noumea. They demanded the removal of Maurice Lenormand and the UC, created a Vigilance Committee, harassed UC officials and barricaded roads, pushing the French Governor to dissolve the GC. A *pied noir* who migrated to Noumea would call that action "the first serious stand against the expansionism of the *Union calédonienne*" (Maresca, 1980: 13-24; Chatenay, 1993: 267-73).

A Decade of Recolonization

In the referendum of September 1958 that ratified the new republic, 98% of New Caledonian voters chose to remain in the French Community. Two months later the UC again won the TA election, with assurance from Paris that the *loi-cadre* would still apply. But the new French High Commissioner in Noumea, Laurent Péchoux, had experience in suppressing native nationalism in Côte d'Ivoire. In 1959, with the support of Gaullist Premier Michel Debré in Paris, he began a decade-long process of stripping away the powers of self-government that New Caledonia had acquired since World War II. First, Laurent Péchoux took away Maurice Lenormand's control of the civil service, police and radio station. Then, invoking the law against accumulating high offices, he also forced Maurice Lenormand to give up being Vice-President of the GC in order to remain Deputy to Paris. Laurent Péchoux expressed satisfaction that his "rapid return backwards" had caused New Caledonia's "definitive reattachment and confident relations with the Mother Country" (Péchoux, 1959). The UC began to lose leaders to the opposition, and in April 1962, when Algeria finally won its independence, bombs were set in Noumea. One in front of the TA failed to go off, but another exploded in the UC headquarters. Ironically, the court convicted Maurice Lenormand for failing to prevent the latter crime and took away his civil rights for five years. Laurent Péchoux left New Caledonia that same year (Maresca, 1980: 28-38).

The retaking of possession would continue in the 1960s, even though Western Samoa and Nauru, with UN help, became the first colonies in Oceania to achieve independence, and the Cook Islands chose Free Association with New Zealand. In September 1963, Secretary of State for DOM-TOMs Louis Jacquinot visited New Caledonia, but Roch Pidjot, Maurice

Lenormand's Melanesian successor as Vice-President, urged UC followers to boycott the official welcome. Soon afterwards, the *loi Jacquinot* stripped the GC of its ministerial powers, leaving it only a consultative role. Paris would take over control of secondary and technical education as well, citing a lack of local funds and trained personnel. The UC campaigned in the 1967 TA election on a platform of restoring the *loi-cadre* and won 69% of the votes. In early 1968, the TA voted 23-8 for internal autonomy and sent a delegation to Paris, but DOM-TOM Minister Pierre Billotte refused even to see them (Thompson and Adloff, 1971: 326). In January 1969, the three *lois Billotte* took away territorial control over mining, large-scale investments of 15 million CFP or more, and local commune elections. In addition, Paris divided the New Caledonia into four subdivisions, each administered by a centrally appointed sub-prefect, fueling UC fears of departmentalization (Colombani, 1999: 59-67). Even loyalist Caledonian Senator Henri Lafleur criticized the new laws as "an act of distrust" by France (Lafleur, 1969). Self-determination in New Caledonia seemed dead.

Why this retrograde policy? Jean-Marie Colombani speculates that because nickel prices were rising, and the UC was talking of inviting outside investment from INCO of Canada to counter the local monopoly held by the Rothschild-controlled Société le Nickel (SLN):

> "The French state had thus judged it necessary to master the development of New Caledonia in the interest of course of its inhabitants, but also in the interest of the nation." (Colombani, 1999: 65)

Billotte himself had told *Le Monde* (20/1/68) that he wanted to "put a brake on speculations" about diversifying New Caledonia's investments. Certainly the profit motive was a factor, as nickel exports tripled between 1966 and 1969; in 1968 alone, the value of ore exports rose 63%. Japan bought about half of those exports, and it was making about US $1 billion a year from selling military supplies to the United States for its war in Vietnam (Postel-Vinay *et al.*, 1971; Forsberg, 2000: 258, n.10). Yet France also had strategic ambitions, as exemplified in its arms sales abroad and the transfer of its nuclear testing program from Algeria to French Polynesia in the mid-1960s. New Caledonia was an important naval base, and its nickel was crucial for the armament and aeronautic industries, because as an alloy it hardens metals for armor, nuclear arms and missiles (Maclellan and Chesneaux, 1998; Yost, 1988). In late 1968, the new DOM-TOM Secretary, Michel Inchauspé, said that France had a "duty" to control such strategic resources in the "national interest" (FA, 6/12/1968). As Jean Freyss has written:

> "nickel is considered, like oil, as an element of national independence […]." (Freyss, 1995: 82)

Rival versions of nationhood and decolonization also clashed when the nickel boom stimulated massive immigration. The population of New Caledonia increased by one-fifth between 1969 and 1971, as 15,000 French and Polynesians arrived. By 1976, there were 25,000 new settlers, including about 2,000 *pied noir* exiles from Algeria, who were "completely foreign to the history of this territory and who were hardly concerned with the slogan 'two colors, one people'" (Freyss, 1995: 26; Postel-Vinay *et al.*, 1971: 32; Lyons, 1986: 122). Even local-born Europeans resented the *zoreilles* who often brought with them better educational and employment qualifications as well as attitudes of superiority. As Frédéric Bobin notes:

> "During the euphoria of the nickel boom of 1968-1972 there were numerous incidents of verbal and physical abuse between Caldoches and newcomers, who were referred to as invaders." (1991: 304)

Yet France actively encouraged this migration by creating a special recruiting office. Noumea Mayor Roger Laroque said the territory needed to "breed whites" (Bobin, 1991: 304), and Premier Pierre Messmer told his DOM-TOM Secretary that the way to quiet local nationalism was to create a non-indigenous majority through "an operation of overseas colonization" (Henningham, 1992: 62-63).

Building Castles in Cuba and China

France has a revolutionary as well as a colonizing heritage. The republicans of 1789 and after often proclaimed that their political values were universal and that its colonized peoples should be grateful to assimilate to French laws, language and civilization. Yet the metropolitan media also represented non-Europeans as living outside of history and used racist images to portray both colonial subjects overseas and immigrants (Blanchard and Bancel, 1998). In this

contradictory context, African and Antillean students in Paris developed the idea of *Négritude*, a celebration of black pride, and in the 1950s Cheikh Anta Diop argued that the ancient Egyptians were black, so that "civilization" ultimately came from Africa. Pan-Africanism inspired many students in France to see themselves as the vanguard of independence that swept across Africa (Guimont, 1998). In addition, the long war over Algeria not only toppled the Fourth Republic, and sent 900,000 Europeans fleeing across the Mediterranean from an Arab Socialist revolution, but also provoked intense debates about decolonization and national identity among intellectuals such as Frantz Fanon, Albert Memmi, Jean-Paul Sartre, Albert Camus and Pierre Bourdieu (Le Sueur, 2001).

In the 1960s, a broader Third Worldism symbolized by the Non-Aligned Movement created an almost millenarian opposition to imperialism (Willetts, 1978). It was the era of armed African liberation movements against Portugal and British settler colonies, the spreading influence of the Cuban revolution, the Chinese Cultural Revolution against revisionism, and Ho Chi Minh's second war against outside domination. That last struggle became a symbol to many radicals that US support for "freedom" in the Cold War often interfered with decolonization (Rosaldo, 1993: 35). In fact, a growing informal empire threatened self-determination. U.S. multinational corporations, backed by the economic restructuring that lending institutions like the IMF[6] and World Bank required for debt-relief, achieved new heights of power, exploiting millions of Third World poor while often backing corrupt dictators. Like Marxism, global capitalism promised rapid development, but based on free trade, shifting production, and "efficient" economies of scale that transcended nation-states (and labor unions). The quest for profit used slogans of peace, plenty, and democracy, and modernization theory recommended the smashing of tradition to free individualism (Barnet and Müller, 1974; Peet, 1991). European and Japanese multinationals would also contribute to this "process in which the last surviving internal and external zones of precapitalism […] are now ultimately penetrated and colonized in their turn" (Jameson, 1984: 207).

The university education that Caledonian and Kanak students had to travel to France to obtain thus included concepts of equal human rights, Third World liberation and class struggle. They also met other students from all corners of the empire and beyond, so that their stay in the cosmopolitan "mother country" sometimes changed their perspectives on their own homeland. To which France were they supposed to assimilate, the colonizer or the emancipator? Given the settler-dominated power structure in New Caledonia, and the mission reaction against Communist organizing, the answer is not hard to find, despite the moderate reformism of the UC. Formal education in New Caledonia had long been the privilege of a small minority, until more state funds became available after World War II. Most Melanesians attended tribal missions and vocational training schools, while better-off Caledonians usually attended the *Lycée La Pérouse* in Noumea as preparation for higher education in France. A training center for primary school monitors in Nouville and a trickle into the seminary in Paita and the *Lycée* provided some upward mobility for Melanesians. In 1962, the first Melanesian earned a baccalaureat degree, but gradually more state scholarships increased the flow of New Caledonian students to France (Thompson and Adloff, 1971: 499-504). Not all university students became radicals, but among those who did, two main tendancies emerged: Third World leftism and indigenous nationalism, both of which often allied against colonialism.

In 1962, the *Association des étudiants de la Nouvelle-Calédonie et des Nouvelles-Hébrides* (AECH) created a student bulletin, *Trait d'union* (*TU*). AECH was officially non-political, but TU articles soon addressed issues that returning graduates would face, such as competition for jobs from metropolitan migrants, over-dependence on the nickel industry to the detriment of rural agriculture, and the marginalization of Melanesians. In 1965, AECH president and *TU* editor Jean-Paul Caillard highlighted New Caledonia's development needs and called for a clearer policy, "conceived from the inside, not the outside […]". In the same issue, co-editor Max Chivot interviewed Apollinaire Anova-Ataba, a Melanesian priest whose thesis celebrated Chief Ataï, leader of the largest native revolt in 1878, as a heroic martyr for unity and freedom. Apollinaire Anova-Ataba hoped that Melanesians and other Caledonians

6. International Monetary Fund, which like the World Bank was dominated by US interests.

could amalgamate, as the UC had been prescribing, and he regarded the recent *loi Jacquinot* as a regressive obstacle to the development of the Caledonian personality (*TU*, June/Sept. 1965). In 1966 Nidoish Naisseline, a high chief's son, began a series of essays that borrowed inspiration from Aimé Césaire, Frantz Fanon and Albert Memmi, among others. He was one of the few Melanesians to study at La Pérouse before moving to France, where he was influenced by liberation theology in a Protestant *lycée*. In his higher studies in sociology at the Sorbonne, he specialized in the search for identity by young Kanak urban migrants, dialogued and demonstrated with Marxists and other radicals but never accepted their ideological paternalism (Naisseline, 2001).

Together, such young intellectuals developed an anti-colonial discourse that adapted ideological currents from many sources to the local needs of decolonization in New Caledonia. Nidoish Naisseline revalued the derogatory term *Canaque* (later *Kanak*), much as Aimé Césaire had done with *nègre*, arguing that Kanak custom and Western civilization should learn from and adapt mutually to each other, instead of expecting the indigenous civilization to give way. Nidoish Naisseline noted with irony that it was in France that he discovered his own "originality", because he found more acceptance there than in Noumea, where he was taught to become French (*TU*, Jan/Feb 1966). He criticized the way *colons* used language to create an inferiority complex among Kanaks, with *petit nègre* and the familiar voice. Nidoish Naisseline recommended that the educated Kanak should speak proper French, subversively, "to bring into being a new type of individual", an echo of Frantz Fanon (*TU*, Dec. 1967). Borrowing from Georg W.H. Hegel and Jean-Paul Sartre, he said that the partial emancipation of Kanaks since World War II had been a gift from whites that simply allowed the slave "to eat at the table of the master". The Kanaks needed to struggle like American blacks for full recognition as equals to construct a better world (*TU*, Jan/Mar 1968). It was clearly colonialism, not France *per se*, that he was criticizing.

By early 1968, student essays in *TU* addressed the recolonization of New Caledonia. One writer, for example, supported the UC's proposal to allow a second nickel mining company, such as INCO, to break the SLN monopoly. During the May student-worker revolt, various New Caledonians participated as individuals, and Jean-Paul Caillard's bloody photo after being beaten by police appeared in *L'Express* and in the home press. Those who became radicalized by the experience formed a *Comité d'action pour l'autonomie de la Calédonie et de la défense de la France* that supported the grassroots France of people who were demanding change, not the state alliance with private business interests that was taking away self-government in New Caledonia. In *TU*, Jean-Paul Caillard defended the activism of New Caledonian students in France against complaints in the home press, arguing for an autonomy based on better education for both white Caledonians and Melanesians, so that outside interests could not dominate either any longer (*TU*, Sept/Oct 1968). Nidoish Naisseline added an essay about the three phases a Melanesian student passes through: first he tries to assimilate, only to regret his lost identity, then he tries to reject western ways, and finally he becomes realistic. Rather than living in "an imaginary future, or an idealized past", he decides to solve problems in the "most just" way, according to "his time" (*TU*, Dec1968).

That December, the radical students formed a new organization, the *Association des jeunes Calédoniens à Paris* (AJCP), which launched a new bulletin in February, 1969, *Canaque homme libre* (Kanak Free Man). Max Chivot wrote in support of autonomy for New Caledonia, because it had the natural resources to finance its own development and more trained leaders were emerging. All the ethnic groups should integrate, on the basis of equality and of mutual recognition of their own identities, and develop better ties with Pacific neighbors. Nidoish Naisseline defended the activism of Kanak students, arguing that despite racist accusations by the home press, they were not the dupes of leftists. He reminded his readers of how the 1931 Colonial Exposition in Paris had also stereotyped Kanaks to deny their humanity. He compared Kanak radicals to the rebellious peasants in Brittany, anti-nuclear Tahitians and protesters in Guadaloupe. In response to right-wing claims that French settlers had developed New Caledonian resources and thus benefited Kanaks, Nidoish Naisseline pointed out that Kanaks were not even allowed into certain hotels in Noumea except as folkloric performers. In Fanonian tones, he wrote that the systemic violence of colonial rule in New Caledonia left

those who wished to restore the Melanesian personality with only two choices: to dialogue, or to revolt. Capitalism and colonialism had forced the native to struggle against both an exploitative economic system and racial denigration:

> "a new combat is born, that of the liberation of the native: to give him a chance, to see him finally restored to his dignity and responsible with all Caledonians for the happiness of everyone." (*Canaque homme libre* 1, 1969)

Clearly, the radical students were interacting with both the conservative home press, which was usually financed by local business interests, and with global activism of which May 1968 was one episode. Jean-Pierre Devillers, a Caledonian literature student in Aix-en-Provence, argued that the student-worker uprising had encouraged large numbers of people to rediscover Marxism, but it was of a Third World variety inspired by Che Guevara's image of small groups of mobile guerrillas and Mao's mass line of party-peasant dialogue not the Trotskyist "cult of the theoretician". Jean-Pierre Devillers recommended leadership that was more representative of and responsible to the grassroots, albeit disciplined by democratic centralism (Archives Caillard, 1969). In May 1968, radical students and workers had destabilized France almost as much as paratroopers and terrorists had in 1958. But the Fifth Republic endured, despite a weakening of Charles de Gaulle's prestige that contributed to his downfall in April 1969 (Wright, 1981: 429; Thompson and Adloff, 1971: 327-28). Meanwhile, Guevara's Bolivian adventure had proven fatal, and Mao's youthful Red Guards provoked an army backlash (Chaliand, 1978; Dirlik, 2000). The radical New Caledonian students in France were only a handful, comprising a study group called GAIAC (*Groupe d'action pour l'indépendance accélérée de la Calédonie*). Might the recolonization at home provide the necessary conditions to stir up anti-colonial action? After all, a small Communist Party had sparked the eventual rise of the autonomist UC.

The *Foulards rouges*

In their summer vacation at home in 1969, Caledonian and Kanak radicals would try to apply some ideas and tactics they had learned in "revolutionary" France. They found support at first among some SLN workers, dissident politicians and Loyalty Islanders. For example, in June 1968, a small group of leftists who worked at the Doniambo nickel processing plant had founded a Marxist bulletin called *Sikiss*. They resented the biased, superficial coverage of the May uprising in France and accused the local bourgeoisie, including the UC leadership, of being colonial reactionaries. *Sikiss* defended Nidoish Naisseline's controversial essays in *TU* as being the first reflections by a native "outside the narrow framework of established ideas". They offered up heroes ranging from Guevara and Mao to Louise Michel, an anarchist who had been exiled to New Caledonia after the Paris Commune of 1871, and criticized the celebration of French annexation on September 24th as blind chauvinism. The editor of *Sikiss*, Gerald Moglia, who was an active unionist, had won nearly a thousand votes in the 1967 TA election, but *Sikiss* noted that proletarian consciousness was limited by a racist class system that pitted poor whites against poorer Melanesians. Moreover, the nickel boom immigrants, including Polynesians from other French Pacific colonies, were inclined toward opportunism, not revolution (*Sikiss*, *AC*).

Jean-Paul Caillard, Jean-Pierre Devillers and others met informally with such kindred spirits in Noumea and planned ways to raise anti-colonial consciousness. On the night of Saturday, 12th July, their group painted on the walls of public buildings in Noumea revolutionary slogans such as "Down with Colonialism, Free Caledonia, and Independence Yes!". Public works employees erased the graffiti before Bastille Day on Monday, 14th July, but the publicity caused a stir in the local press, which condemned the "degradation of public edifices" and noted that the few young hotheads responsible, including Jean-Paul Caillard and Jean-Pierre Devillers, had been arrested (*VC*, 16/7/1969). The radicals explained their actions, arguing that a colonial situation existed in New Caledonia, because people were not being prepared to control their own economic future, the elected TA had no real authority over law-making, the local ruling class owned the media and thus prevented the legal spreading of anti-colonial information, and the French administration "illegally" occupied the buildings where the graffiti had been painted (Archives Caillard). *Sikiss* praised the three young wall-painters as patriots, but Jean-Pierre Devillers suggested that

they should try to form local action committees and, in particular, to mobilize Melanesian students (*Sikiss*, 7/1969; AT 107W: 667)[7].

One week later, Nidoish Naisseline arrived in Noumea on summer vacation, and being the son of a high chief on Mare would enable him to cause what became known as the *réveil canaque* (Kanak Awakening). His anti-colonial reputation had preceded his return to New Caledonia, because of his articles in *TU* and *Canaque homme libre*, including a letter printed in the latter that claimed he wanted *colons* to be confined to reserves and made to dance the waltz and tango for black American tourists. Drawing inspiration from the raised fist protest of black American athletes at the 1968 Olympics in Mexico, Nidoish Naisseline targeted the upcoming Pacific Games in Port Moresby, Papua New Guinea. He and other radicals spoke to the apolitical Melanesian Cultural Association[8] and found some support. Late on 7th August, the night before the three graffiti painters of 12th July went on trial, several young Melanesians painted graffiti on public buildings. The new graffiti condemned colonial racism and advocated a boycott of the Moresby games, because participation would conceal the inequality of Melanesians at home; a few slogans were also anti-white. The next morning, the white radicals, bolstered by the attendance of their supporters, turned their trial into a political platform and received suspended sentences with fines. Outside the Police Commissariat that evening, Nidoish Naisseline and fifty other Melanesians demanded the release of those arrested for the 7th August graffiti. On 9th August, athletes from Mare wore *foulards rouges* (red scarves) around their heads as they left for the Games, and Nidoish Naisseline raised a fist in salute. Some Mareen athletes would later repeat that gesture in Port Moresby (AT, 107W: 667).

The next act in the Kanak awakening was provoked by tests of local segregation policies in restaurants, which in turn led to a tract, arrests and a momentous riot. Fote Trolue, now a judge and then a student at Do Kamo, a Protestant high school, recalls hearing the *Foulards rouges* (FR) speak at informational meetings. He said their view of the local situation, having been outside the country and come into contact with global revolutionary ideas, opened his eyes to the habitual second class status that missionary paternalism had persuaded Melanesians to accept. After being refused service in a restaurant in Baie de Citrons, until he threatened to make a scene, Fote Trolue wrote about his experience. Entitled "Are we not French?" it was printed in French and in the indigenous languages of Lifou and Mare, and distributed. In fact, when Fote Trolue, Nidoish Naisseline and French administrators were attending a chiefly marriage on Lifou, the tract was put next to each place set at the banquet. The police arrested thirty people, including several white radicals, and accused them of two crimes: calling for armed revolt, and publishing in indigenous languages without official permission (Trolue, 2001). The tract condemned racism, affirmed the Melanesian personality, called for an independence struggle, and urged Melanesians to give up alcohol, to wake up and stop cooperating with exploitative white *colons*. Misunderstood metaphors in the indigenous versions were sensationalized by the authorities and local press into an apology for "murder" and "racial hatred" (*VC*, 29/10/69). Clearly, only one political version of France was permitted in New Caledonia.

As rumors circulated about a demonstration on 24th September, Nidoish Naisseline and some companions arrived in Noumea by plane from Mare on 2nd September and were arrested for carrying copies of the anti-colonial tract. He and six other prisoners were questioned by the police, while several hundred supporters gathered outside the Commissariat. At the end of the afternoon, the police would still not release those arrested, so Melanesians from Mare, who regarded Nidoish Naisseline as a high chief's son and resented what they saw as colonial disrespect for his customary rank, pounded on the door of the Commissariat and threw stones and bottles at the building. The police charged and dispersed the crowd, at the cost of two police injuries, but the violence spread into the center of Noumea, where rioters used iron or wooden bars to smash streetlights, store windows and cars, attacking several whites and seriously injuring a taxi driver. Thirty arrests followed,

7. *Sikiss* also pointed out that during the 1965 presidential elections, Gaullist slogans such as "No to Autonomy" had appeared on buildings, but they were not erased and no one was arrested.

8. The ACM was founded in early 1969 to promote Melanesian education and concrete rural development programs; backed by the religious associations and encouraged by Paris, it tended to be conciliatory.

and more trials and publicity. The local press called the incident a carefully planned provocation, but the radicals said the crowd acted spontaneously. Either way, nothing like it had been seen in Noumea since the anti-UC violence of June 1958[9]. Afterwards, Nidoish Naisseline wrote:

"We have decided to say no in order to define ourselves […]. We struggle for Man and not against the White Man […]. The condition for racial harmony in New Caledonia [is] for each ethnic group to develop its personality as much as possible and to respect the others instead of wanting to rule them, or letting others rule them." (AT, 107W: 1606)

One Country, Two Nations?

One week after the riot, a debate in the TA revealed how the established political parties were reacting to the FR. The UC introduced a motion opposing independence, racism and violent demonstrations; it condemned the protesters of 2nd September, demanded the punishment of those responsible, asked the Administration to remain vigilant and energetic in restoring order, and requested the public to keep calm and help restore an atmosphere of ethnic harmony (AT, 107W: 1606). The UC had already been very critical of the graffiti painters, accusing subversive young white leftists of "seducing a few Melanesians who lacked political maturity […]" (*AC*, 31/7/1969). Henri Lafleur of the *Rassemblement calédonien* responded positively to the UC motion, voicing dismay that their university students, many of whom were on territorial scholarships, would turn against their country:

"I would simply like to know […] if this affair doesn't extend beyond the borders of New Caledonia. And, in the inquiry that will be done, it will be very important to determine if our students are not under the influence of certain people, in France, who sometimes give them advice which goes against the interests of New Caledonia and Caledonians." (AT, 107W: 1606)

Neither the UC nor its adversaries were ready to acknowledge that (a) their children could have a political vision of their own, or (b) Gaullist France had already "advised" Caledonians and revoked their autonomy.

One member of the TA, however, had a different view. Yann Céléné Uregei and several other Melanesians had been distancing themselves from the UC old guard since early 1968, when they began to resent paternalistic, conciliatory European leaders who did not fully support their motion for internal autonomy. These dissident Melanesians felt that their people had inferior status because of too little educational and economic aid. Yann Céléné Uregei had greeted Nidoish Naisseline at the airport on his arrival in July 1969, attended his meetings, and tried to help him when in prison. In the TA discussion of 2nd September, he called the UC motion of condemnation premature, because not enough was known about the origins of the radical tract. Yann Céléné Uregei praised Nidoish Naisseline for the sound ideas in his essays: racism did exist in New Caledonia, and the young protesters were not promoting it, as some claimed, but opposing it. The young subjects of Nidoish Naisseline's father may have gone too far, Yann Céléné Uregei said, but they always showed devotion for a high ranking chief. On Mare, two days before Nidoish Naisseline's arrest, he and his friends had passed out tracts, only to have the Administration send over 36 soldiers in two planes, to the shock of many inhabitants, who remained peaceful. Yann Céléné Uregei argued that the rioters had been provoked and were following custom:

"I am in complete solidarity with all these young people who seek, I think, to improve the daily life of Caledonians, whether European or native, and who don't seek, far from it, to kill whites as some pretend" (AT, 107W: 1606, TA 9/9/1969).

Yann Céléné Uregei's relationship with the young radicals would fluctuate, but together they began to open space for more radical anti-colonial Melanesian politics[10]. By mid-1970, the radical students in France divided into two groups, one white and the other indigenous; each would study the particular problems of their own communities and work to bridge the gap in understanding between them. The Melanesian group began to publish a journal

9. A white Self-Defense Committee distributed a tract after the riot, blaming Maoists for trying to ruin the ethnic peace in New Caledonia and vowing to descend into the streets to protect lives and property.

10. Protestant Pastor Raymond Charlemagne had moved in this direction in the mid-1950s, breaking from the moderate religious association he had helped to found and leading his new Free Evangelical Church toward stronger Melanesian promotion through political reform and education. He too had turned against the UC.

called *Réveil canaque* (*RC*), which was first distributed after Nidoish Naisseline came home again in August to be tried for the tract of 1969. At the trial, he declared:

"It's true, we wanted to commit two murders: that of the myth of white racial superiority and that of the myth of Canaque savagery."

The Kanaks had no desire to dominate or harm white Caledonians, he said, but simply wanted to escape their assigned role of "headless" bodies whom the European intelligence needed to civilize:

"To the refusal of self that colonialism imposes on us we respond with the acceptance of self […] of the Canaque personality […]. We must struggle against racism because it prevents us all from posing the essential problem: that of class struggle. Unite, exploited peoples of Caledonia." (*CN*, 19/11/1970)[11].

RC called 1969 the Year I and likened the 2nd September demonstration to storming a Caledonian Bastille, because the Kanak people were no longer divided. It also regarded Chief Ataï of 1878 as a hero and criticized the statue in the center of Noumea that portrayed him kneeling to surrender (*RC*, 9/1970).

The *Foulards* supported Yann Céléné Uregei's candidacy for the TA Presidency in the September 1970 election, but he lost to Jean Lèques of the UC. This setback pushed Yann Céléné Uregei to resign from the UC along with several other Melanesians in the TA to form a party of their own, the *Union multiraciale de la Nouvelle-Calédonie* (UMNC). At the first UMNC congress in January 1971, he said that the UC had become too bourgeois, had outlived its historical role for Melanesians, and kept them in submission and inferiority. The young students had opened a new phase of Kanak promotion, when the indigenous people needed to choose their own future while protecting their culture, and only internal autonomy would make that possible (*RC*, 5/2/1971). The FR wanted independence, but they allied with Yann Céléné Uregei because he had supported them in 1969 and had now formed the first Kanak-based party. But some worried that he was a dupe or too opportunistic. In July 1971, he traveled to France and Switzerland and met with Baron Rothschild and other powerful financial leaders of the Moral Rearmament Movement, which for thirty years had preached that capitalism was good because only a few employers were not. The UC openly accused Gaullists of playing divide and rule by using Yann Céléné Uregei to split the party (*AC*, 15/12/71). In September 1972, the UC lost the TA election for the first time in almost twenty years, due to loyalist immigration and the defection of both the UMNC and Jean Lèques's *Mouvement libéral calédonien*. By early 1973, Yann Céléné Uregei excluded Max Chivot's *AWA* group (who were publishing a satirical leftist journal) from the UMNC and broke with the FR, calling them "extremists". In July and again in October, he allied with the anti-autonomists to win election as TA President, ironically becoming what Jean-Paul Caillard called the "representative Melanesian" that local business interests had always wanted to head a loyalist majority (*VC*, 14/11/1973).

Toward "Kanak Independence"

At the January 1972 congress of the UMNC on Mare, hosted by Nidoish Naisseline's father, some FR had chafed at the opening Christian prayers, which they said mocked their personality. But officially the FR followed customary protocol and said they learned from their UMNC elders that "Caledonian unity can only happen through respecting cultural differences". They criticized the presence of the bourgeois media, which called the UMNC racist, and distinguished between the colonial press and sympathetic white leftists in their movement:

"We firmly believe that the theft of Canaque lands and the misery of workers represent two faces of a single reality. 'Tribes, factories, united front' is our slogan." (*RC*, 12/2/1972)

In March, Nidoish Naisseline was arrested again, this time on his home island of Mare, and the result was more publicity for the anti-colonial movement, which now attracted support even from the UC (*AC*, 19/4/1972). Nidoish Naisseline had challenged the authority of the sub-prefect on Maré to enforce French laws, so two planes of police arrived to take him to Noumea in handcuffs. *AWA* ran a cover cartoon

11. Nidoish Naisseline received a suspended sentence, as did the other prisoners, because the authorship of the tract and individual acts during the riot were hard to prove. A metropolitan lawyer from the League of the Rights of Man, Jean-Jacques de Felice, defended them successfully, and would again.

of Nidoish Naisseline on the cross as Christ, while *Réveil canaque* portrayed him with a headband labeled Ataï. Although condemned to six months in prison for "threatening a high official", Nidoish Naisseline defended his actions on the basis of custom: the Administration had recently confiscated 75 hectares of land on Maré without consulting Kanak chiefs, and he rejected colonial authority on Mare, despite the *lois Billotte* (*RC*, 19/5/1972). Typically, *Les Nouvelles-calédoniennes* wrote: "custom is no excuse" for insulting an official (*LNC*, 22/3/1972).

The UMNC and UC both condemned Nidoish Naisseline's conviction in the TA and demanded the abolition of the Pierre Billotte laws, especially the change in commune elections, which they saw as a plot to break up the Melanesian tribes (*AC*, 28/3/1972). But tensions continued among the UC, the UMNC and the radicals over tactics and policies. In May 1973, young leftists organized the *Union jeunesse calédonienne* (UJC), with support from the FR, *Awa*, some UC and UMNC members, unionists, and Alain Bernut's *Mouvement populaire calédonien* (MPC). With Max Chivot as president, the UJC sought to unite young people to defend their interests against colonialism:

> "Let's lose our inferiority complexes that our enemies created inside us to better exploit us."

RC printed an essay entitled *Toward a Caledonian Nation*, which rejected the neo-colonialist line that locals lacked the capacity to build a fraternal country and would only degenerate into ethnic warfare if France withdrew. It cited the Kanak unity demonstrated by Ataï in 1878 and the worker unity shown in the general strike of 1971, arguing that massive immigration and colonial exploitation were creating a shared sense of national identity in New Caledonia, though each community could keep its own personality (*RC*, 5/1973). In August, the UJC voted to support autonomy as a step toward independence, and by early 1974 its meetings sported a Caledonian flag: red and green, with four stars representing ethnic groups (Archives Caillard).

After UJC meetings and FR demonstrations culminated in more arrests on Bastille Day, 1974, Kanak radicals from Grande Terre formed *Groupe 1878*. Unlike the Loyalty Islands, which were entirely native reserves, less than ten per cent of Grande Terre was under Kanak tribal control, so *Groupe 1878* prioritized the restoration of indigenous lands. In September the radicals chose two symbolic targets, the colonial statue of Ataï surrendering to Governor Olry in the Place des Cocotiers, and the annual commemoration of annexation (since September 24, 1973, the FR had regarded it as a day of national mourning). Nidoish Naisseline and UJC member Jean-Jacques Bourdinat spray-painted the statue red and green and were later fined. But police continued to break up meetings and demonstrations by the UJC, FR and *Groupe 1878*, including a protest in front of the Mairie joined by the Pacifist and Anti-Racist Union. On 24th September, during the official parade along Anse Vata, *Groupe 1878* and the FR held a small rally. Elie Poigoune jumped over a barrier by the spectator tribune and called for independence, followed by Henri Bailly. Soldiers and police arrested them, along with *Groupe 1878* President Déwé Gorodé[12], Bernadette Montéapo, and others. At the trial of Élie Poigoune and Henri Bailly, the judge ordered the sympathetic audience expelled, but they staged a sit-in, until attacked by the police, who arrested a dozen more people. Three days later, all of the accused offered the judge roses; but Elie Poigoune got two weeks in jail and Henri Bailly eight days, and their arrested supporters, including Jean-Paul Caillard, Jean-Pierre Devillers, Jean-Jacques Bourdinat, Déwé Gorodé, Robert Casola and others got two to six months in prison. Sitting was apparently more criminal than jumping, and white *provocateurs* got longer sentences. On release, several continued to protest, painting public monuments and even burning the French flag, and were arrested again (*Le Kolonisé*, 10/1974; *FA*, 22/10/1974).

A persistent campaign of civil disobedience developed, including hunger strikes, tracts, petitions and support networks from New Caledonia to students and lawyers in France, but the Administration continued to suppress the protesters' freedoms of speech and assembly, and Paris ignored repeated demands by the TA to restore autonomy. In January 1975, during the visit of the DOM-TOMs Secretary Olivier Stirn, a bomb was set (but disarmed) on the desk of the President of the TA, and slogans painted on the walls said, "Kanak[13] Independ-

12. She had written about gender issues for the FR and 1878, for example the multiple ways that Kanak women, especially the educated, risked being alienated from their own people by colonialism (*RC*, 9/1972).

ence" (Bailly, Noumea, 2001). That same month, *Groupe 1878* publicly called for revolutionary Kanak independence (Poigoune, Noumea, 2000). They explained in their journal, *Nouvelles 1878*, that it meant: (1) the restoration of all Kanak lands—France would have to pay compensation to non-Kanak landholders— (2) the nationalization of all mines, (3) the confiscation of small businesses to redistribute their wealth to the poor, and (4) the establishment of Kanak citizenship, which could include non-Kanak who chose to remain in the country and thus have the right to participate in the government. *Groupe 1878* clearly regarded the return of Kanak lands as an essential precondition for future race relations. Along with other radical groups, it also strongly opposed Melanesia 2000, the cultural festival planned by Jean-Marie Tjibaou in cooperation with liberals in the French administration, calling it a "sabotage of Kanak Culture" (*Nouvelles 1878* 9, 1975). The FR espoused Kanak Independence in March and formed three branches, one to work on each Loyalty Island. Déwé Gorodé also began to travel abroad on behalf of the movement, first to the Nuclear Free Pacific conference in Fiji in April and then to New York in June to speak to the UN Decolonization Committee in June (Gorodé, Noumea, 2000).

Meanwhile, Yann Céléné Uregei returned to a stronger Kanak nationalist position. In May 1975, he traveled to Paris with a TA delegation to request a new statute for New Caledonia as well as economic aid because of a fiscal crisis following the end of the nickel boom. President Valéry Giscard d'Estaing said he was too busy to receive them, and Stirn opposed a referendum on autonomy because it implied future independence. Yann Céléné Uregei left in anger, telling *Le Monde* he wanted internal autonomy. Gaullist Premier Jacques Chirac met with the remaining TA delegates, and Maurice Lenormand asked him to consider the autonomy proposal. Jacques Chirac's response TA:

> "There is no choice: it's the current statute amended as much as possible or it's independence, because internal autonomy became outdated ago. And since no one wants independence, it seems reasonable to consider amending the current project [i.e., limited administrative autonomy]." (*FA*, 13/6/1975)

Kanak radicals saw this stark choice as either departmentalization or independence, and the UMNC declared for Kanak independence. At a conference in La Conception on 25th June, the UMNC, some Kanak members of the UC, the FR and *Groupe 1878* issued a communique calling for a referendum on Kanak independence, the creation of a single Kanak party, and sending a delegation to the UN. A Committee of Coordination for Kanak Independence formed, to continue discussion about how to define their goals (*Nouvelles 1878* 27, 1975).

The Road to the Events

How exactly could Kanak independence be achieved? As *Groupe 1878* admitted:

> "we don't have arms, we don't have the demographic majority, and there is no political unity among the Kanak people."

They decided to try electoral politics (*Nouvelles 1878,* 9). As the FR and *Groupe 1878* planned the creation of a formal party, a young Kanak named Richard Kamouda was shot to death by a policeman in Noumea. The radicals called it an assassination, demonstrated in protest for two days and held meetings around the country, adding new impetus to anti-colonialism. In January 1976, independence supporters met in Amoa on the east coast of Grande Terre and launched the *Parti de libération kanak* (PALIKA), which launched a journal, *Kanak*, in February and held its first congress in May. PALIKA opposed the colonial domination of Kanak culture and demanded the recovery of Kanak lands, developed a protest strategy of land occupations. Quoting Mao, it also criticized both the UC and UMNC for not consulting the mass base enough and called for "revolutionary combat" (*Kanak* 1, 2/1976)[14]. PALIKA won two TA seats in 1977, while the UMNC lost supporters who preferred autonomy as a goal and left to form the *Union progressiste multiraciale* (UPM)[15]. The former UJC became the *Parti socialiste calédonien* (PSC), one faction of which supported independence, and the uc moved closer to a pro-independence stand (Caillard, Noumea, 2001; Barbançon, Noumea, 2001).

13. Canaque was now spelled with K's, though only later would it become gender/number neutral.
14. Meanwhile, loyalist opponents had formed an action committee against independence (CACI) nearby.
15. Yann Céléné Uregei sooned formed FULK (*Front uni de libération kanak*), which had ties with anti-western states.

Most white Caledonians and other immigrants, fearing exclusion, fled toward the right, and loyalists were already manipulating dependent Tahitians and Wallisians into violent action against pro-independence Kanak (*VC*, 19/11/1969; *AC*, 12/6/1974). In April 1977, Jacques Lafleur (son of Henri) formed the *Rassemblement pour la Calédonie* (RPC), with a platform of loyalist multi-racialism and anti-leftism; and in July 1978 he combined it with Jean Lèques's MLC to form the RPCR (*Rassemblement pour la Calédonie dans la république*) just in time for a visit by Jacques Chirac. Centrist Caledonians formed the FNSC (*Fédération pour une nouvelle société calédonienne*), allied with the RPCR and had their own leader elected President of the TA. By 1978, the Administration had begun integrationist programs of Melanesian promotion (through education and loans), some added responsibilities for the GC, economic development, and land reform, as DOM-TOMs Secretary Paul Dijoud showed sympathy for Kanak grievances (Ovington, 1988). But as more anglophone Oceanian colonies became independent, PALIKA continued to demand full independence, and labor unions held major strikes. In June 1979, a new requirement that political parties win 7.5% of the votes to gain seats in the TA forced the UC, FULK, PSC, UPM and PALIKA to unite in an Independence Front (FI), which won 14 of 36 TA seats and began to attend South Pacific Forum meetings (*Association pour la fondation d'un institut kanak...*, 1984).

For some, the election in May 1981 of Socialist François Mitterrand as French President offered hope for peaceful liberation. But for others the criticism by the new DOM-TOMs Secretary, Henri Emmanuelli, of the colonial situation in New Caledonia was "hateful" (Chatenay, 1993: 343). Moreover, political violence was already mounting in New Caledonia, as exemplified in the assassination in 1981 of UC militant Pierre Declercq, who was replaced as Secretary General by Éloi Machoro. In 1982, Jean-Marie Tjibaou's FI formed an alliance with the FNSC that enabled him to become GC Vice President, but in July right-wing extremists attacked the TA hall (*LNC*, 22/7/1982). At Nainville-les-Roches in July 1983, fourteen years after the first pro-independence graffiti in Noumea, Socialist Premier Georges Lemoine tried a last-ditch attempt to negotiate peace between the FI and the RPCR. The resulting communique proposed to (a) abolish the colonial situation by recognizing Kanak civilization as equal to the West, (b) recognize the legitimacy of the Kanak people as the first inhabitants and their right to independence, while accepting the historical legitimacy other groups as victims of exploitation, and (c) grant a statute of internal autonomy as a transition to an act of self-determination. But the RPCR's voters would not accept such "demeaning" terms, leaving the FI (soon the FLNKS[16]) to carry out its plan to declare unilateral independence on September 24, 1984, since that goal could not be negotiated peacefully (Tchoeaoua, 1984: 103, 107 ; Barbançon, Noumea, 2001).

Conclusion

The post-1940 history of New Caledonia has seen structural cycles of reform and repression. Gradual multi-ethnic decolonization by the UC in the late 1940s and 1950s was interrupted by recolonization in the 1960s and 1970s, when the Gaullist regime in Paris unilaterally reasserted its strategic and economic interests, reinforced by a nickel boom and new immigration. Such a political and demographic regression could only offend UC dissidents and young Kanak and Caledonian students returning from France. After being educated in liberation ideologies and the practical experience of the May 1968 student-worker uprising, a new generation began another cycle of self-government demands. 1969 was a turning point, making September not only the month of the *prise de possession* (or the wartime rally to Charles de Gaulle) but also of the Kanak awakening. The outnumbered Kanak now had to assert their indigeneity as leverage, but calls for Kanak independence—tied to socialism—polarized politics and ethnic relations again. Attempts to find a middle ground failed (Cherrier, Noumea, 2001; Barbançon, Noumea, 2001), until the Events forced France and the RPCR to revisit the concepts once proposed at Nainville. As Georges Chatenay wrote in 1993:

> "History will say if, in the light of the Matignon Accords [of 1988], the FNSC does not merit a rehabilitation […]." (Chatenay, 1993: 342)

16. *Front de libération nationale kanak et socialiste*.

Nothing is inevitable in history, but many Kanak felt that their culture was "up against the wall"[17].

As for the argument that outside influence caused the Kanak awakening or the Events, such "advice" clearly came from both sides of the political spectrum. Gaullist France had tried to impose its own interests on New Caledonia, and when anti-colonialists pushed for something beyond autonomy, Paris promoted integration. The left side of French politics remains under-represented in New Caledonia, except perhaps in the militant labor unions and in PALIKA[18]. Leftist radicals supported a multi-ethnic, class-oriented independence, while the Kanak asserted their own identity as paramount in their version, which fellow "victims of history" were expected to support. Today, after the bloodshed of the 1980s and two negotiated peace accords, France is again granting autonomy to New Caledonia, over the next fifteen years with a possible referendum on independence afterwards. Critics warn that this autonomy may resemble the *colon* fantasies of World War II, but the Kanak have achieved significant cultural recognition and politically control two out of three provinces, including important mining projects in the north (Chappell, 1999). People seeking reconciliation speak of a possible "Kanaky New Caledonia". Yet mining industry development in the populous, multi-ethnic, RPCR-controlled south continues to be neo-colonial in practice[19], and a new nickel boom threatens still more immigration...

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17. See *Nouvelles 1878* 5, 1975, adding "We don't want to be integrated into a system that is imposed on us from the outside".

18. In 1981, PALIKA split into two factions, one that supported "scientific socialism" and has become the second largest pro-independence party after the UC, and another that emphasized cultural nationalism and survives as the much smaller LKS (*Libération kanak socialiste*), mainly in the Loyalty Islands.

19. For example, the controversy over the INCO project at Goro/Prony, which offers only 10% royalties to the Southern Province and Territory, compared to the 51% controlled by the North in its partnership with Falconbridge.

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